



NEWS

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Bay Area Cancer Risk Down by 40%

Air District Report Shows Steady Decline in Air Toxics

The latest Bay Area Air Quality Management District report on air toxics shows a 40% decline over the last five years in health risks from carcinogenic substances that are routinely measured in the ambient air. Of greatest significance are reductions of 50% in average benzene levels, and 40% in average 1,3-butadiene levels--both of these compounds are products of internal combustion engines. These reductions are primarily due to the use of reformulated gasoline. In addition, Air District efforts to reduce industrial and commercial air toxic contaminants show a substantial decline over the last 7 years.

The Air District has had a program for the evaluation of toxic air contaminants since 1987. In addition to monitoring the overall levels of toxic compounds in the air, the health risks associated with air emissions from industrial and commercial facilities are specifically evaluated under the Air Toxics "Hot Spots" Program. Under this program, the Air District inventories the amount of various toxic substances emitted from facilities and performs health risk assessments to estimate cancer risk and other potential adverse health effects.

In 1991, the first year of the risk assessment phase of the "Hot Spots" Program, 30 facilities in the Bay Area were identified with cancer risks requiring public notification. An aggressive toxic reduction plan was implemented in 1991 and today, only one industrial facility in the Bay Area requires public notification, with a maximum risk of 14 in a million.

Cancer risks are calculated by examining the toxicity and concentration of various substances and population exposure over a 70-year lifetime. The Air District requires facilities to notify surrounding communities if the maximum cancer risk from the facility's emissions exceeds 10 in a million. By comparison, an individual's overall risk of contracting cancer over their lifetime is nearly 1 in 3, or 333,000 in a million.

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The Air District has adopted many regulations directed at reducing public exposure to air toxics. Most recently, risk reduction measures have been implemented for all dry cleaners resulting in reduced exposure to perchloroethylene, a suspected human carcinogen, for those living and/or working near one of the nearly 1,000 facilities in the Bay Area.

"As the first air district in the state to implement a toxic air contaminant reduction plan in 1991, we are proud that our efforts have produced such dramatic results and we will continue to protect the health of Bay Area residents," the Air District's Executive Officer Ellen Garvey said.

The 1998 Air Toxics Report may be found on the Air District's website:
www.baaqmd.gov

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